



**Olympia:** It is appropriate for you to be proactive in following up with Olympia given you have concerns for her welfare, and as she has missed work without informing you. As she is a new staff member, you also have little knowledge about her personal circumstances. Your priority is concern over her welfare, despite her current work performance issues. You are likely to have further opportunities talk with her in more detail about her work progress in future. One thing you could prioritise is discussing how Olympia can get in touch with you if she is likely to be away again. You might express your concern and discuss this as a point of safety. From your observations of Olympia's changes in mood over time, it is possible that she is experiencing symptoms of bipolar disorder.

**Approach:** Olympia is approachable and responsive over video technology (Zoom). You may want to discuss how to manage any technological disruptions early in the conversation. Olympia also admits that she has not been feeling well recently. You could ask her to elaborate on this by using open ended questions to try and understand things from her perspective. It is also important to ask if she has felt like this before. If Olympia has not experienced her symptoms before, don't imply anything about a diagnosis. Reassure Olympia that anything she shares with you can be kept confidential in accordance with your organisation's policy and the Privacy Act.

**Assess:** It is unclear whether Olympia is experiencing a crisis. Given your observations about her depression, being withdrawn and her expressing some hopelessness about her future, it is important that you assess for suicidal thoughts. You can do this by asking her directly whether she is experiencing any suicidal thoughts. Olympia's sense of hopelessness may be reflective of her difficulty coping at the moment and the impact that her mood might be having on other areas of her life. Asking her whether she thinks there has been a change in her work, personal life and social connections is important to further assess her functioning.

**Listen:** Given Olympia is withdrawn, and you are still building a relationship with her, you may think about how you listen and communicate with her using both verbal and non-verbal cues over Zoom to demonstrate an empathetic response. Going at her pace will be important, as will encouraging her to be open and candid about how she has been feeling recently. Reassure Olympia that you care by empathising with her on the impact of starting a new routine, job, formulating new relationships, and working from home etc.

**Give:** Check with her first about what information and supports she thinks she needs right now. Through this discussion you may get a sense of whether she has existing supports or whether she needs help accessing further information. Respectfully suggest some resources (i.e. factsheets) on mood disorders that are available online from Beyond Blue, or other resources available in the manual. Offering her the opportunity



to chat again about how she is travelling is important. You could suggest having a follow up discussion with her about the work progress and the potential to make reasonable adjustments to her schedule.

**Encourage** (prof): Check if Olympia is already linked to professional supports, and whether she feels comfortable contacting them. You can also ask if Olympia has a relapse plan and whether she is able to follow this. If not, you may ask her what help she needs to follow her plan. If this is Olympia's first experience of 'becoming unwell' then ask her if she is aware of the professional supports that may be available to her. Given her feelings of hopelessness about the future and depressed mood, it is important to encourage Olympia to see her GP and access further mental health supports. Options for tele-health providers can be obtained from your resource list.

**Encourage** (other supports): You might like to ask Olympia what family and other supports could help her right now. Have a discussion about what the workplace can do to support Olympia. Encourage Olympia to engage in some self-help strategies, and encourage activities that can have a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing such as relaxation techniques, having a good routine for sleep, eating well, avoiding drug and alcohol use etc.



**Asilah:** This scenario highlights that it can sometimes take a few attempts to begin a mental health first aid conversation with a colleague. Your persistence and ability to stay connected with Asilah despite her attempts at pushing you away is encouraging. This helps Asilah to know that you care. As a colleague, you have noticed a change in her mood, social interactions and motivation with work. You are quite accustomed to having conversations with Asilah over the phone given your remote working situation.

**Approach:** Your approach begins at the end of a work-based conversation where the focus shifts to Asilah's wellbeing. Her comment about being fed up about life is a good place to start exploring with her what might be contributing to her feeling this way and considering the impact that this is having on her mood and day to day life. It might be helpful to express your concern for her wellbeing, and your observations about how withdrawn she has been.

**Assess:** Given your observations about her being withdrawn and expressing some hopelessness about life, it is important that you assess for suicidal thinking. You can do this by asking her directly whether she is experiencing any suicidal thoughts. It is possible that Asilah's hopelessness may be reflective of her mood and difficulty coping at the moment. Asking her whether she thinks there has been a change in her work, personal life and social connections is important to further assess her functioning.

**Listen:** Over the phone, you have already picked up non-verbal cues such as her despondency and sense of hopelessness. Be mindful that you cannot see her level of distress as she opens up to you. You can remind her of this and encourage her to let you know if she is distressed, so you are both clear on how Asilah is feeling and whether she is comfortable continuing the conversation. Asking open ended questions can encourage her to share her feelings and experiences with you. Be careful not to interrupt her, or seek to resolve her worries, even if this is related to work and seems 'solvable'. Consider seeking her permission to call her back should you experience any technological difficulties during the conversation.

**Give:** Reassure Asilah about the stressors she might be experiencing. Ask her what information would be helpful for her right now. You can suggest that Asilah have a look at the Head to Health website for a range of online mental health services available for support, such as Beyond Blue. Fact sheets from Beyond Blue on anxiety and depression may help her to make sense of how she has been feeling. Offer practical support, if it is appropriate to the relationship and let Asilah know that you are available to talk about this again in the future.



**Encourage** (prof): Given her feelings of hopelessness, you could ask Asilah if she has professional supports that she can connect with. If not, encourage her to seek professional support from a GP, and a mental health practitioner. On the Head to Health website, tele-health options for professional supports are available, as are crisis support services such as Lifeline. Asilah could also access support from EAP counselling services available to her at her workplace. If Asilah is reluctant to access professional supports right now then listen to the barriers that may come up for her, and suggest that she may like to have a look at some of the fact sheets as a start. Seek her permission to check in again about how she is feeling about things in the future.

**Encourage** (other supports): Check with Asilah whether her friends and family are aware of how she has been feeling and can support her or assist her to access support. Encourage Asilah to engage in some self-help strategies, and encourage activities that can have a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing such as exercise, relaxation techniques, having a good routine for sleep etc.